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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: social integration

Statement submitted by Global Youth Action Network, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Introduction

1. The following is a statement by the Global Youth Action Network to the 47th session of the Commission for Social Development on the theme of social inclusion. Youth comprise approximately 18% of the world's population, and 85% of youth live in developing countries.[1] With youth comprising such a percentage of the population, they should and must be consulted on issues that affect their lives. Youth have valuable input and experiences to provide, and efforts to increase social integration among young people will not be effective unless young people feel ownership of the process.

2. Global Youth Action Network conducted an electronic consultation with over one hundred forty of its member organizations in forty-two countries and in three different languages to discuss the idea and principals of social integration.[2] Members discussed the building blocks of social integration — inclusion, participation, and justice. Their summarized experiences and opinions about these key principals of social integration follow, and we urge all Governments to listen to their views and recommendations when creating and implementing policies to further develop "societies for all".

Inclusion

3. Participants define inclusion as allowing all people without discrimination to be recognized, encompassed and protected by policies governments make. But, participants see the promotion of inclusion not only in the roles of policymakers but also individuals. One participant from Bangladesh defines inclusion as *"The diverse participation of individuals, who though separate in terms of race and religion, can meet on common humanitarian [ground] for the establishment of a culturally diversified, harmonious, and peaceful nation."* Youth participants ask to be respected and considered because of their diverse perspectives.

4. While participants believe inclusion is necessary to build "societies for all", they still see much exclusion in their countries. Decent education still remains a privilege of the rich, not a right for everyone. A participant from Ghana asks *"How fair of a society do we make when intelligent and capable people are left unrecognized [and] limited in their choices because they have no university degrees, and so they become marginalized, discriminated against, unemployed, poor and hungry?"*

5. Policymakers need to work with the people that are most affected by exclusion to bring them into society. One participant from Kenya suggests *"Policymakers be trained outside the formal education to understand the importance of inclusion in any process affecting the country, a society, or a group of people."*

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[1] Youth and the United Nations, http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/qanda.htm.

[2] For a full archive of messages and a list of participants, please visit: http://groups.takingitglobal.org/gyan_csocd09.

Participation

6. The responsibility to ensure participation does not lie entirely with governments. Yet, governments should educate individuals on their rights and duties as members of a society, and also encourage their policymakers to open new avenues for dialogue and seek out the experiences of those marginalized . A participant from Indonesia believes *participation happens when policymakers consult citizens, ask the people to discuss, and make a solution together*.

7. Being contributors to development is also very important to young people. A participant in Sierra Leone says *"Policymakers still regard youth as problems instead of a solution."* Consultation participants are all involved in organizations striving to actively participate in their communities, and they prove that they can be part of the solution. Participants also suggest national service, open forums, and wider use of technology as ways of becoming engaged.

Justice

8. Many participants feel that justice is "creating a sense of fairness on the state level." To an Eritrean participant, this fairness translates as *"The people's right to education, health, etc. is what should be achieved."* Other participants also agree that education and healthcare should be a right for all, but few participants actually see this sense of fairness being carried out. A participant in the Democratic Republic of the Congo *does not rely on the government to make changes, but rather, depends on the Congolese people*.

9. Low confidence in government and institutions does not promote social inclusion. Members of society who feel apathetic or left behind by policies will not want to participate in their governments. A participant in Mexico *does not see much justice in his society, but believes to combat corruption by actively engaging in society can lead to justice*.

10. High levels of corruption all over the world continue to undermine the work towards social inclusion and leave people with little hope in their countries. These attitudes should not be acceptable. One participant from Uganda describes *the biggest problem as implementing the policies already in place*. Policies without action have no meaning. Member countries must become serious about addressing the fundamental building blocks—inclusion, participation, and justice—of social integration. Without addressing all three of these issues, the vision of creating "societies for all" can not be realized.

11. Recommendations

Considering the consultation with our youth participations, we recommend:

1. **Governments encourage projects that raise community awareness about social integration - Education in all sectors (formal, informal, and non-formal) must be used to promote understanding within the community, knowledge of their rights, and to ensure all people have opportunities for social mobility.**

2. **Governments should encourage participatory dialogue- Policymakers should become more accessible to communities by means of open forums to discuss issues before creating policies.**

3. **Governments must be accountable to all members of society. Accountability should be achieved through transparency in the recruitment and decision making process in public policy offices. Governments should provide accessible information about public services, rights, and opportunities for all people.**

4. **Governments should provide accessible healthcare and education to all people. Education and healthcare should be considered a basic right for all groups in society. Governments should insure equal opportunity for employment, public office, and civil service.**